

**House Resolution**

**No. 42**

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**Introduced by Assembly Member Roger Hernández**

March 10, 2016

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House Resolution No. 42—Relative to César Chávez.

1 WHEREAS, César Estrada Chávez recognized that for many  
2 people, spanning many generations and many ethnicities, the path  
3 to a better life frequently begins in the fields. For many  
4 farmworkers, the American Dream means a life of self-sacrifice,  
5 hard work, and perseverance; and

6 WHEREAS, César Chávez experienced the hardships and  
7 injustices of farmworker life firsthand. He was born on March 31,  
8 1927, in the North Gila River Valley in Arizona, on the small  
9 family farm his grandfather homesteaded. César Chávez’s father  
10 lost the farm during the Great Depression, forcing the family to  
11 join some 30,000 farmworkers who followed the crops throughout  
12 California and lived in tents and makeshift housing that often  
13 lacked a bathroom, electricity, or running water; and

14 WHEREAS, César Chávez understood the value of education  
15 as a path to a better life because he quit school after completing  
16 the 8th grade to work full time, helping to support his family in  
17 the fields. Later in life, César Chávez became self-educated through  
18 his passion for reading; and

19 WHEREAS, Although later a pacifist, in 1946, César Chávez  
20 enrolled and served his country in the United States Navy. He was  
21 honorably discharged whereupon he married Helen Fabela and  
22 eventually settled in the East San Jose barrio nicknamed “Sal Si  
23 Puedes” (“Get Out if You Can”) to raise a family that eventually  
24 numbered eight children; and

1 WHEREAS, In San Jose, César Chávez was introduced to the  
2 social teachings of the Catholic Church and trained in peaceful  
3 community organizing strategies and tactics. César Chávez and  
4 Fred Ross, an organizer for the Community Service Organization  
5 (CSO), established CSO chapters across California and Arizona  
6 during the 1950s, helping Latinos register to vote, pushing for  
7 basic public services and infrastructure in the barrios, peacefully  
8 battling police brutality and racial discrimination, and creating the  
9 most effective Latino civil rights group of its era; and

10 WHEREAS, In 1962, after failing to convince the CSO to let  
11 him organize farmworkers, César Chávez resigned from the only  
12 decent paying job he ever held and moved his wife and eight  
13 children to Delano, California. There, with \$1,200 in life savings  
14 that was soon gone, César Chávez, his family, and close friends  
15 began building the National Farm Workers Association, which  
16 later became the United Farm Workers of America (UFW); and

17 WHEREAS, In 1965, in a partnership with a union of Filipino  
18 American farmworkers, César Chávez organized a major strike  
19 against grape growers in California. The following year, César  
20 Chávez led an unprecedented 340-mile march, from Delano to  
21 Sacramento, that placed the farmworkers' plight before the  
22 conscience of the American people. Supporters carried slogans  
23 with the words "HUELGA" (strike) and "VIVA LA CAUSA"  
24 (long live our cause), advocating for improved compensation and  
25 labor conditions. Later efforts resulted in the enactment of  
26 California's historic Agricultural Labor Relations Act of 1975, the  
27 first and still the only law in the nation to "encourage and protect"  
28 the right of farmworkers to organize and bargain with their  
29 employers; and

30 WHEREAS, Through countless strikes, boycotts, marches, and  
31 fasts that produced many victories and some defeats, César Chávez,  
32 who even considered vegetarianism an integral part of living  
33 nonviolently, never stopped his peaceful battles on behalf of the  
34 farmworkers with whom he shared his life. His dedication to his  
35 work earned him the respect of some of our greatest political and  
36 civil rights leaders, including Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther  
37 King, Jr., and Jesse Jackson. César Chávez's motto in life, "Sí Se  
38 Puede!" or "Yes We Can!" has served as an inspiration not only  
39 for Latinos, but for working Americans of all walks of life; and

WHEREAS, In 1993, César Chávez died peacefully in his sleep in San Luis, Arizona. Forty thousand people marched behind his plain pine casket during funeral services in Delano to honor this man. They came to affirm César Chávez’s words from his landmark 1984 address to the Commonwealth Club in San Francisco: “Once social change begins, it cannot be reversed. You cannot uneducate the person who has learned to read. You cannot humiliate the person who feels pride. You cannot oppress the people who are not afraid anymore”; and

WHEREAS, Although César Chávez was uncomfortable with personal recognition in life, since his passing Chávez has been honored in hundreds of communities. César Chávez was awarded “El Aguila Azteca” (the Aztec Eagle), Mexico’s highest award presented to people of Mexican heritage. In 1994, President Bill Clinton posthumously presented César Chávez with America’s highest civilian honor, the Presidential Medal of Freedom. In 2006, California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger inducted César Chávez into the first class of the California Hall of Fame. In 2011, the United States Navy announced naming the latest Lewis and Clark-class cargo ship being built in San Diego the USNS César Chávez; and

WHEREAS, Since César Chávez’s passing, the UFW has continued his work through organizing farmworkers and campaigns to enact laws and regulations to bring dignity and protections to farmworkers. Meanwhile, the César Chávez Foundation continues improving the lives of hundreds of thousands of farmworkers and other low-wage working families through 30 high-quality affordable housing communities it has built or renovated and manages in four states, a network of nine popular educational Spanish-language radio stations in three states, after-school tutoring for disadvantaged students in two states, and the National Chávez Center, including a visitor center, memorial gardens, and educational center on 187 acres in the Tehachapi Mountains where César Chávez lived and worked, and is buried; and

WHEREAS, César Chávez successfully increased public awareness of farmworker working conditions. To many Californians the farmworkers’ struggles are an issue from the past, a belief reflected by the fact that farmworker suffering typically takes place in remote areas far from cities, thereby rendering farmworkers invisible to our society. The fruits and vegetables

1 that we enjoy in our daily lives are produced by farmworkers who  
2 often endure long hours of backbreaking work and still face  
3 challenges such as inadequate enforcement of pesticide, safety,  
4 and labor protection laws in the fields; and

5 WHEREAS, Farmworkers still dream of providing a better life  
6 for their children, but the reality of having to move from crop to  
7 crop makes this dream hard to achieve. Economic forces and the  
8 rising cost of living have pushed farmworkers further into poverty;  
9 and

10 WHEREAS, In 2000, the Legislature passed and Governor Gray  
11 Davis signed into law Senate Bill 984 (Chapter 213 of the Statutes  
12 of 2000) to create the first annual state holiday in the country on  
13 César Chávez's birthday, March 31. Under that law, the State  
14 Board of Education also created a statewide curriculum on Chávez  
15 and encourages schools across the state to engage teachers and  
16 students in service learning projects as a way of honoring the  
17 legendary farm labor and civil rights leader; now, therefore, be it

18 *Resolved by the Assembly of the State of California*, That the  
19 Assembly calls upon all Californians to observe César Chávez's  
20 birthday, March 31, as a day of public service; and be it further

21 *Resolved*, That the Assembly calls upon all Californians to  
22 recognize the hard work and self-sacrifice that farmworkers go  
23 through to feed all the families in our state; and be it further

24 *Resolved*, That the Assembly calls upon all Californians to learn  
25 from César Chávez's life and his mission of nonviolence, social  
26 justice, and selfless service to others; and be it further

27 *Resolved*, That the Chief Clerk of the Assembly transmit copies  
28 of this resolution to the Chávez family, particularly César Chávez's  
29 widow, Helen Chávez, the United Farm Workers of America, the  
30 César Chávez Foundation, and the author for appropriate  
31 distribution.